

Beware of 809 calls

Wisconsin consumers are complaining about a new telephone scam, says the Department of Agriculture, Trade and consumer Protection.

The scam works like this: You get home and notice that the message light is blinking on your answering machine. You listen to the message, the caller asks you to call a number beginning with area code 809 or another international number to receive information about a family member who has been ill. (They may also tell you someone has been arrested, died, you have won a wonderful prize, etc.)

In any event, concerned or curious, you make the call. Sometimes the phone will be answered by a person who claims to speak broken English. (The idea is to keep you on the line to build up charges.) Or, sometimes you will just get a long recorded message. The bottom line is, when your phone bill comes, you see this

incredible charge, often times more that \$100.

Crooks are using the 809 numbers as "pay-per-calls" to get around U.S. regulations and 900 number blocking. Everytime you call the number, they get a greatly inflated rebate from the foreign phone company. Since the 809 numbers are in the Caribbean, they aren't bound by U.S. 900# regulations that require them to warn you of the charge and rate involved, or to provide a time period during which you may terminate the call without being charged.

The newest twist to this scam is to page people using the 809 numbers. With the new area code changes, people unknowingly are returning these calls. When the bill comes, there are HUGE charges for the calls.

No matter how you get the message, if you are asked to call a number with an 809 area code that you don't recognize, **DON'T RETURN THE CALL!**

It's bad enough that the criminal is invading your privacy, don't let them invade your wallet as well!

Scams of this type are extremely hard to prosecute, and since you did actually make the call, neither your local phone company nor your long distance carrier will want to get involved. They'll tell you that they are simply providing the billing for the foreign company. You will end up trying to deal with a foreign company that feels they have done no wrong. It can turn into a real nightmare!

For more information, or to file a complaint, contact the Bureau of Consumer Protection at:

(800) 422-7128

FAX: (608) 224-4939

TTY: (608) 224-5058

E-MAIL:

datcp hotline@datcp.state.wi.us

WEBSITE:

<http://datcp.state.wi.us/>

(Produced in cooperation with the National Fraud Information Center.)

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